Improvement in functioning of passport offices

381. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering to improve functioning of the passport offices by making it prompt and accessible services in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) It is the constant endeavour of Government of India to improve the functioning of passport offices to render prompt and efficient services to the applicants. Several steps have been taken to achieve this objective including through special pendency clearance drives in various passport offices. As a result, the time taken to issue passports has been brought down significantly. Fresh guidelines have been issued to all passport offices to carry out Process Re-Engineering to simplify the procedures for issuance of passports. With a view to bring the passport services closer to the applicants, the passport applications are also being accepted at approximately 450 District Passport Cells and more than 200 Speed Post Centres across the country.

(c) Not applicable.

Denial at UK visa to single youths

382. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that according to an independent watchdog monitoring the work of UK Visas, the Government of UK is following an uncalled for Policy of debarring young, single boys and girls from entering UK on the pretext that they would get married and settle there (UK);

(b) whether it is also a fact that the refusal rate for applications has gone up from 6.5 per cent four years ago to 15 per cent in 2003; and

(c) if so, Government reaction in this regard?